

First dinosaur fossil in Washington discovered at Sucia Island

Paleontologists from the Burke Museum have published a description of the first dinosaur fossil from Washington State. A research team from the museum collected the fossil on Sucia Island Marine State Park in the San Juan Islands. The paleontologists discovered the dinosaur fossil while collecting ammonite fossils (a nautilus-like creature) from a marine rock feature known as the Cedar District Formation.

About the Sucia dinosaur: The fossil is a partial left femur of a theropod dinosaur, the group of two-legged, carnivorous dinosaurs that includes *Velociraptor* and *Tyrannosaurus rex*. The fossil is 16.7 inches long and 8.7 inches wide; the whole femur would have been more than 3 feet long. The dinosaur is from the Late Cretaceous period and is approximately 80 million years old, according to Burke Museum scientists.

Scientists noted that 80 million years ago, the rocks that today form Sucia Island were likely deposited farther south. How much farther south is a matter of scientific debate, with debated locations ranging from as far south as present-day Baja California, Mexico, to Northern California. Earthquakes and other geologic forces moved the rocks north to their present-day location.

State Parks preserves and interprets

natural history: Washington State Parks issued the Burke Museum team a scientific collecting permit prior to excavation. Any discovered or excavated items are considered public and remain the property of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission's collections. Washington State Parks curates and shares Washington's natural and cultural heritage with the public through on-site interpretation and other interpretive programs. State Parks frequently partners with the Washington State Museum of Natural History and Culture, also known as the Burke Museum, to help with curation and public education. Initial public display of the dinosaur fossil will be at the Burke Museum.

Collection legal only with permits: Fossil exploration and collection is legal in state parks only with proper permits issued by Parks for legitimate scientific research. Excavation or collection of any natural resources without the proper permits is illegal.



The first dinosaur fossil described from Washington State (left) next to a cast, or replica, of the fossil. The fossil was discovered by Burke Museum paleontologists at Sucia Island State Park. It is a portion of a femur leg bone which belonged to a theropod (meat-eating, two-legged) dinosaur. Photo courtesy of the Burke Museum.



About Sucia Island State Park: Sucia Island State Park is one of several marine parks within the state park system. Located in the San Juan archipelago in Northern Puget Sound, Sucia Island is considered the crown jewel of the state marine park system and is consistently marked as one of the top boating destinations in the world.

Activities at the park include:

- Boating: Sucia Island has boating facilities that require a use fee; these include 48 mooring buoys, two linear moorage systems and two docks at six locations around the island.
- Picnicking: There are 25 picnic sites, five picnic shelters and potable drinking water available in the summer season. For details, visit www.parks.wa.gov.
- Camping: 60 campsites, four group camps, which may be reserved nine months in advance by calling 360-376-2073.
- Hiking: Sucia Island has 10 miles of hiking trails.
- Fishing and shellfish harvesting: Recreational licenses are required through the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. For information on seasons and to purchase a license, visit www.dfw.wa.gov.

History of Sucia Island State Park: Coast Salish tribes of North America occupied this area; archaeological surveys indicate use of more than 2,500 years. Europeans came to the island when the 1791 Elisa Expedition sailed into the area in search of the Northwest Passage. The Spaniards named the island Sucia, referencing the rocks and reefs which from the sailor's perspective "fouled" the waters for navigation and landings. White settlers lived on the island in the 1800s, but land claims were not legitimate because the land was designated a Federal Lighthouse Reserve.

State Parks acquired about one-third of the island in 1952. Later, when developers wanted to parcel up the remainder of the island into vacation lots, Seattle yachtsman Everett Henry spearheaded a fundraising drive. The Interclub (now called the Recreation Boaters Association of Washington) raised \$25,000 in 1960 to purchase the land and donate it to Washington State Parks for use as a marine park. State Parks acquired the remaining parcels of private land in 1972, and Sucia Island in its entirety became a state marine park.